

See Arthur
Schlesinger
New York Times
Chicago Tribune

An Ancient Canard

That professional pop-off, Prof. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., has turned up on the opposite-editorial page of the New York Times to defend that newspaper's publication of bootlegged Pentagon secret documents bearing on United States intervention in the Indochina War.

His method is the curious one of dredging up two news stories published by THE TRIBUNE 30 years ago and seeking to imply that, whatever the Times has done now, it is insignificant compared to the conduct of THE TRIBUNE then.

In developing this interesting thesis, Schlesinger, true to form, has his facts all scrambled up. He has always been a sloppy and slanted historian, but on this occasion he exceeds himself.

He contrasts the asserted "forbearance" of President Franklin Roosevelt toward THE TRIBUNE with the "insensitivity" of the Nixon Department of Justice in seeking to enjoin publication by the Times and other newspapers. All of this would be interesting if true, but it is not.

TRIBUNE stories cited by Schlesinger are [1] a report of Dec. 4, 1941, detailing Roosevelt's plan to mobilize 10 million men for service in a war in Europe after he had campaigned a year before on the pledge that "your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars"; and [2] a story of June 7, 1942, at the time the United States had inflicted a smashing defeat on the Japanese fleet at the Battle of Midway.

Schlesinger says that the first story dealt with "secret Army war plans." In fact, it was not an operational plan at all. Its principal effect was to expose Roosevelt's hypocrisy.

The second story is described by Schlesinger as having "revealed that we had broken the secret Japanese naval codes." It did nothing of the sort, and not even the Japanese interpreted it in that light. If they had, they would have changed their codes at once, but they did not do so for almost a year and a half. They did so only after the commander of the combined fleets, Adm. Yamamoto, was shot down in the Southwest Pacific by American fighter planes whose pilots had been informed of his route.

THE TRIBUNE's Midway story endeavored to reconstruct the battle order of the Japanese naval force sent against Midway Island. It was a collaboration between Stanley Johnston, a war corre-

spondent who had been present at the earlier Battle of the Coral Sea, and Wayne Thomis, aviation editor. At the time there was nothing in any censorship regulations relating to estimates of the strength and composition of enemy forces. Johnston pieced together his surmises about the Japanese task force which approached Midway, using assumptions anybody could make.

He knew of previous Japanese naval losses and which carriers had been damaged. He knew what cruisers, supply ships, and attack vessels were still available. He knew the Japanese would send the cream of the remaining crop against Midway. Referring to Jane's "All the World's Fighting Ships," he made a shrewd appraisal of what the Japanese had sent into action. The story appeared in 70 newspapers, one of them in Washington.

The Navy Department called Johnston and Thomis to Washington. At the end of four days of meetings, the admirals seemed to lose interest, assured the two TRIBUNE men they had never doubted them, and told them to forget the whole thing.

These matters rested until August, when Roosevelt's attorney general, Francis Biddle, presumably acting on White House orders, said that a federal grand jury would investigate THE TRIBUNE to discover whether action should be taken for publishing "confidential information." The announcement was unusual in itself, for the usual practice is to give no advance notice of such hearings to those they might involve. Biddle also sent a special assistant attorney general to Chicago to direct the inquiry.

At the end of a week, after Johnston, Thomis, and the managing editor of THE TRIBUNE, J. Loy Maloney, had appeared before the grand jury at their own request, the grand jury decided that no indictment was merited or would be returned. But it cannot be said that the administration hadn't tried.

It is to be noted that the Johnston-Thomis story made no reference to codes of any kind, and the grand jury was aware of this.

The Schlesinger version of this episode and the earlier story dealing with the administration's mobilization plan does not accord with the facts. He says that "the Roosevelt administration, tho greatly tempted, took no legal action against THE TRIBUNE in the first in-

stance and, in the second, finally abandoned legal action forced by the Navy on a reluctant Department of Justice."

The errors in this statement are manifest. The Navy did not "force" anything. As stated, it had told Johnston and Thomis to forget the matter. Roosevelt's Justice Department was not "reluctant." It followed the boss' orders, but it did not succeed in making a case. THE TRIBUNE at the time described the administration's action as political harassment.

Schlesinger caps his tortuous account by stating, "The fact that Nixon's Department of Justice has demanded action against newspapers, where Roosevelt's Department of Justice, under greater provocation and in more parlous times, resisted doing so indicates, at least, an ominous insensitivity to the First Amendment on the part of the present attorney general. John Mitchell, alas, is no Francis Biddle."

Thus endeth the day's lesson in distortion.